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# The Kingdom of God



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## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By EUGENE S. SMITH

The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are one and the same institution under different names. Generally speaking Matthew uses the name "kingdom of heaven," while Mark and Luke use the name "kingdom of God." This interchangeable use is shown by a comparison of Matt. 11:11 and Luke 7:28. In these passages the writers are reporting the same incident and one uses one name as the other uses the other name and thus shows their identity to be the same.

The kingdom of God and the church are the same, for Christ in speaking of the church in Matt. 16:18, goes right on in the nineteenth verse to refer to the institution as the kingdom. Christ prophesied that the kingdom of God would come with power during the lifetime of some standing by Him in Mark 9:1. He said that the power would come with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Then on the day of Pentecost as the Spirit came, with power for the apostles, it was the church that was established and to it men began that day to be added by the Lord. From that day on it was an existing institution to which the Lord added "such as were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

In the prophetic books of the Bible the term "Mountain" is used symboli-

cally for "kingdom." God's kingdom was symbolized in Daniel 2 by a mountain growing from a "stone cut out of the mountain without hands." This becoming a "great mountain" says Daniel, is the "kingdom" which God was to set up that would never be destroyed. In Isa. 2:2, the prophet said, "It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain (kingdom) of Jehovah's house shall be established." In I Tim. 3:15, Paul says, "the house of God, which is the church of the living God." Therefore the kingdom of Jehovah's house is the church. The three names "kingdom of God," "kingdom of heaven," and "the church" are but different names for the same institution and it is commonly known to men today as "the church."

### There Is But One

When we consider this institution as a kingdom we know of course that there is but one. Christ is the king and he being but one can reign over no more than one kingdom. We never hear any one refer to the "kingdoms of God" for all are fully aware that there is but one kingdom. The Bible always refers to it in the singular number and all men in speaking of it follow that pattern. It would perhaps be safe for me to say that you have never heard anyone refer to this institution "the kingdom of God" in the plural number. It is God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven and there is but one.



Likewise when Christ speaks of his church he uses the singular number. He says, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). So also speaks the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:47 as we read, "The Lord added to the church daily." It is never "churches" (plural), but always "church" (singular). Paul speaks of it in the same way as he says "The church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The church is the body of Christ and of course when this figure is employed we can very easily see that Christ as the head can have but one body. Just as one king can have but one kingdom so one head can have but one body. Paul says the church is the body in Eph. 1:22, 23, for here we read, "And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." He goes on from this to say in Eph. 4:4, "There is one body." Thus we can see that the Bible talks of but one church.

When we sometimes read of churches in the Bible it is always a reference to various congregations of the one church. It is "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16) "the churches of Judea" (Gal. 1:22), and "the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). This last reference, when considered in its context, shows clearly the meaning of the plural term, that is, it shows that Christ speaks of con-

gregations of the same church in various cities of that section.

Moreover the church is also referred to as "the bride of Christ" (Rom. 7:4), and (II Cor. 11:2). The church is married to "him who was raised from the dead" that we may "bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4). Therefore we must understand that there is but one church or kingdom of God lest we charge Christ with being a bigamist.

### Importance of the Church

As we thus contemplate the kingdom of God we can see its importance. Too many think that it is immaterial whether they are in the kingdom or church. They have been led to believe that the church is a non-essential institution. However, when we see that the church and the kingdom are the same we can readily see the importance of being in it. Our souls are eternal and for them we need an "eternal citizenship." The kingdoms of this world will not stand forever and if they did we can not stay in them by reason of death. Therefore it is important that while we are in this earth we gain a "citizenship" in the one kingdom that shall stand forever.

Paul says "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and surely that is the need of every individual. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are subject to the will of God as it is revealed in Christ. Citizens of the kingdom of God, members of the church, endeavor

to keep God's will on earth as it is kept in heaven and thus fulfill the prayer of Christ.

However the important part of the matter is the final destiny of the kingdom. When Christ comes with the clouds of heaven he is going to "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (I Cor. 15:24). Therefore those in the kingdom will be presented to the Father but those not having citizenship in the kingdom will be left behind to endure the fires of God's wrath.

This same idea is given us in the picture of Christ presenting His "bride" to the Father at the wedding supper of the lamb. The church or kingdom is his bride and it is the bride that is to be presented to the Father at the last day. Those who constitute that bride will be presented to the Father but all others will be left behind to suffer the eternal punishment of the wicked.

More than this, when we consider the church as the "body of Christ" we can easily see the importance of being members of it. Paul speaks of this in Eph. 5:23 as he says of Christ, "Being himself, the saviour of the body." Since he is the saviour of "the body" it is apparent to all that those who are not in "the body" do not have Christ as their saviour. Then since "the body" is "the church" we can see and understand that to have Christ as our saviour we must be members of his church.

This is even more clearly set forth



in Paul's picture of the matter in Acts 20:28. Here we read, "the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood." The church is that house, that family, purchased by the blood of Christ "our passover" who hath been sacrificed for us (I Cor. 5:7). Christ has purchased the church which is the "house of God" and if we are to be saved by the blood of the Christ we must be in the house or church which he has purchased.

### The Identity of the Church

Now knowing the importance of being in the church and realizing that God is building but "one church" we need to know which this is in the midst of the multitude of "churches" in the world today. In the New Testament we have the divine church clearly revealed. We can, by reading there, find certain definite identifying characteristics of the church and then locating the church having these identifying marks today we can know that it is the "church of the Lord."

Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). This rock can be nothing other than the fact of his divinity which had just been confessed by the apostle Peter. Paul says, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). In Acts 8:37 as one obeys the will of God unto salvation that the Lord may add him to His church we hear him making the



good confession, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God." Therefore this is the foundation of the true church, this is the rock upon which Christ is building it and every man or woman built into the church as a "living stone" must make this confession of the faith of his heart.

As noted previously the time of the establishment of this church was the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection. It was on that day that the Spirit of God came to the apostles. The power came with the Spirit and the kingdom was to come and did come with the power. Then any church which began before that time began too soon to be the one the Lord is building and any church that began later than that time began too late to be His.

It was also prophesied that this church would begin in Jerusalem. This church is built by the preaching of Christ's word for that is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). This preaching was to begin at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) and Isaiah had said that "the word of the Lord shall go forth from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:4). Therefore Jerusalem is the starting place and the day of Pentecost is the beginning time. These are identifying characteristics of the true church that must not be minimized or overlooked. In view of this any church that points to Rome, Geneva, London, Boston, Los Angeles or any other city as its beginning place

is not the one that we read about in the Bible.

Moreover Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." He is the founder and the builder of his church. He is the one that can add men and women to it. Men do not join it but Christ adds them to it as they are saved in obedience to his will. Any church that men can join or any church to which men hold the key and into which men are accepted according to the will of man cannot be the one that Christ is building.

Next we must consider the law of this church. The word is the seed and by it all additions to this church are produced. Likewise in it all government is by and according to the word of God. Paul said, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Nothing other than the word of God was used to govern that church. No creed, manual or confession of faith was ever found necessary and those governed by such today cannot be the one we read about in the New Testament.

Finally we must consider the name of the church. The modern names of the modern churches are not scriptural. The church which today is the same as the one we read about in the Bible will

have a name found in the Word of God. Name alone will not identify but it is one of the identifying marks. The church in the Bible is found wearing the name of Christ for he said "I will build **my church**." It being his it should wear his name. It being his bride it should surely wear his name and therefore other names take away the glory and honor that should be given to Christ.

The church of Christ began in Jerusalem more than nineteen hundred years ago on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. It is built upon the confession of Jesus' divinity and every member of it must believe that he is the son of God and must so confess his faith. It is built by the preaching of his word and as men hear and obey they are saved and the Lord adds them to his church and thus they become citizens in the eternal kingdom which shall stand forever. Wearing the name of Christ and walking by his word they give glory and honor unto him.

### How To Enter

Now having learned the identifying marks of the church from the Bible we will also learn from it how we may become members of the church. There is but one way of becoming a member of the church of the Bible and that is to have the Lord add you to it (Acts 2:47). "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain" (Psa. 127:1). There-



fore we want to learn what we must do that the Lord will add us to his church.

In Acts 2:47 we read that "the Lord added to the church such as were being saved." Then if I can become one of "such as are being saved" I will be added to it by the Lord. We can now easily learn what to do to be saved and thus be added to the church by the Lord for men are told what to do to be saved in the word of God. Therefore we will look up those places where that question is asked and learn what God said men should do to be saved that Christ might add them to his church and they thus became citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

Three times the question is asked in the book of Acts and each time people are taught to do certain things, the same things. If we today will ask the same question and hear the same answer to do it surely God will do for us what he did for them. Let us then turn our attention to such a study.

### Those Saved On Pentecost

In the second chapter of the book of Acts the apostle Peter preached a wonderful sermon. There for the first time the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was preached. The hearers were convicted of their sins and convinced that he whom they had crucified was indeed the Son of God. When they heard the thing preached by



Peter they believed in the Christ. Faith thus came by hearing and hearing by the word of God as Paul says it does in Rom. 10:17.

This faith alone did not save them however, nor were they added to the church by it. Faith alone is dead said James in the second chapter of his epistle. This faith did give "power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12) and we see in them an example of faith working unto their salvation.

They believed in the Christ and cried out to ask, "What shall we do" (Acts 2:37)? This is the very thing that we want to know today so get the answer of Peter to those people. "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Thus Peter spake to them and the answer was inspired by the Spirit of God. Now we read in verse 41, "They that gladly received the word were baptized and that day the Lord added unto them about three thousand souls." Thus as Christ had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Peter preached the commands of the Lord and when heard and obeyed they brought salvation. The Lord added them to His church and He will do the same for you today if you will render the same obedience.

## Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Saul of Tarsus was the persecutor of the church who later became the apostle to the Gentiles. As he journeyed toward Damascus he was struck to the earth and a light shone round about him. He heard a voice from heaven and when the voice made known that it was Jesus speaking he said, "Lord, what shall I do" (Acts 22:10). The Lord gave answer to him as recorded in Acts 9:6, "But arise and enter into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

He arose and being blind was led by the hand into the city and was fasting and praying for three days but none of this saved him. He had not yet been told what he **must** do. Some people get the idea that all that is necessary to be saved is to believe and pray. Paul believed on the Damascus road but he was not saved. His sins were still upon him and he was without pardon till God sent Ananias to him to command him, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

This has been God's unvarying rule of conversion since He gave the commission to the apostles saying "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15, 16). It was the thing necessary for Saul of Tarsus though he had seen the Lord and it is necessary

for you today if you would be saved that the Lord may add you to His church and thus make you a citizen in his eternal kingdom.

### The Philippian Jailor

Let us turn now to the third time the question is asked and answered. In this instance the one saved is a Gentile as the others were Jews but of course there is no difference before God today. Peter says, "He put no difference between them and us" (Acts 15:9). Therefore we expect this example to agree with the others in detail and it does. In the jail at Philippi the jailor cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)? Paul made answer to him saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

Now a good many people want to stop right there and cry out that salvation is by "faith alone" but this is not taught here. The record goes right on, "and they spake the word of the Lord unto him with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his immediately" (Acts 16:32, 33). Faith was the first thing commanded but it was not the **only** thing.

They heard the word of the Lord which is necessary to produce faith and the hearing of this word taught them



the necessity of repentance and baptism as is shown by their obedience of that night. Their conversion was as that of the others. They heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins and were baptized for the remission of sins. When all this was done then it is said of them in verse 34 that "they rejoiced, having believed in God."

Therefore if you would be saved today you must walk in the same path of obedience. Paul says, "But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereupon ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6: 17, 18). Therefore it will be in the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5) that you will be saved today. When thus saved the Lord will add you to His church and as a member of this church, as a citizen of the kingdom of God, you can enjoy every blessing of God as He bestows them in His Son the Christ and our Saviour.

It is our hope and prayer that you will obey the teaching of God's word and let the Lord add you to His church and as a member of the church of Christ give honor and glory to the name of Christ all the days that you live and then enjoy eternity in the presence of God and all His holy angels in the beautiful home prepared for the souls of the obediently righteous.



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